

COMMISSION DES DROITS
DE L'HOMME DU CAMEROUN

SOUS-COMMISSION CHARGÉE
DE LA PROMOTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

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CAMEROON HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSION

SUB-COMMISSION IN CHARGE
OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROMOTION

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STATEMENT BY THE CAMEROON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
TO MARK THE 5th INTERNATIONAL SIGN LANGUAGE DAY IN CAMEROON

23 September 2022

The Cameroon Human Rights Commission (hereinafter: "the Commission"), established by Law No. 2019/014 of 19 July 2019 and set up on 29 April 2021, following the swearing-in of Commissioners before the Supreme Court sitting in chambers,

Bearing in mind the UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/72/161 of 19 December 2017 which proclaimed 23 September as International Sign Language Day (ISLD) with the aim of not only "raising awareness of the importance of sign languages for the full realisation of the human rights of people who are deaf" and people with impaired hearing, but also to promote the linguistic identity of deaf and hard of hearing communities,

Aware that the above-mentioned resolution emphasises the need to preserve sign language as an important element of linguistic and cultural diversity worldwide and to promote access to quality education and services in sign language,

Noting that this resolution was proposed to the United Nations by the Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda pursuant to a request made by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) established in 1951,

Noting that the United Nations, through the above-mentioned resolution, "invites all Member States, relevant organizations of the United Nations system and other international organizations, as well as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to commemorate the International Sign Language Day in an appropriate manner, to raise public awareness of sign languages",

Noting, according to WFD 2021 statistics that there are approximately 70 million deaf people in the world and 80 per cent of them live in developing countries¹,

¹ <https://www.un.org/fr/observances/sign-languages-day>, consultée le 15 septembre 2022.

Noting that "*communication*" means, *inter alia*, languages, text display, Braille, touch communication, large print, accessible multimedia, as well as modes, means and formats of augmentative and alternative communication based on written materials, audio materials, simplified language and human readers, including accessible information and communication technologies"²,

Noting further that "*language*" means, *inter alia*, spoken languages and sign languages and other forms of non-spoken languages³,

Considering that multilingualism, a core value of the United Nations, contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the United Nations as set out in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations,

Noting that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006, signed on 1 October 2008 and ratified on 28 December 2021 by Cameroon, recognizes the equality of sign languages and spoken languages and commits States Parties to facilitate their use and learning,

Considering the Preamble of the Constitution of 18 January 1996, which states that "*the nation shall protect ... persons with disabilities*", including the deaf, autistic and hard-of-hearing,

Considering that the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which Cameroon is a party states in Article 18 (4) that "*the aged and the disabled shall also have the right to special measures of protection in keeping with their physical or moral needs*",

Recalling that the above-mentioned United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines "*discrimination on the basis of disability*" as "*any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field ... including denying a reasonable accommodation request*"⁴,

Considering Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities, Section 25 (1) and 27 (3) of which state respectively that "*the State, the regional and local authorities, [... ...] shall set up inclusive education structures and training institutions for trainers by type of disability*", and that "*the socio-economic integration of persons with disabilities includes access to education and vocational training, access to information and cultural activities, access to infrastructure, housing and transport, access to sport and leisure, access to employment*",

² Article 2 de la Convention des Nations Unies relative aux Droits des personnes handicapées.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. Aménagement raisonnable : « *modifications et ajustements nécessaires et appropriés n'imposant pas de charge disproportionnée ou indue apportés* ».

Noting that, according to statistics presented by the Cameroon Organisation for the Development of the Deaf (OCDS) during the Symposium organised on 23 September 2019 in Yaounde, to raise awareness among public authorities on the risks of isolation of people with disabilities, there are more than 30,000 deaf people, 300,000 others with hearing problems and only 10 interpreters for 30,000 deaf people⁵,

Noting further that deaf and hard of hearing persons experience certain forms of discrimination and marginalisation in their daily lives, due to:

- access to information through many communication tools that are still not tailored to their disability (telephone, radio, television and other information and communication technologies)
- freedom of worship, due to the lack of adapted facilities
- access to education, healthcare, vocational training, transport, cultural environments, leisure activities, etc.
- the almost absolute lack of qualified teachers specialised in sign languages
- the lack of sign language interpretation facilities in public services, including the public justice system,

Determined to do what is necessary to ensure that the rights of deaf and hard of hearing persons are promoted, protected and guaranteed so as to enable them to develop harmoniously in society,

The Commission undertook to ensure that disability is considered during the official primary and secondary school examinations for the 2021-2022 academic year through visits to the various examination centres throughout the country,

The Commission reiterates that the resilience of deaf and hard of hearing persons deserves to be encouraged and supported by introducing sign language in education, teaching and public services,

The Commission commends the Government of Cameroon for its efforts, particularly:

- the signing of Decree No. 2018/6233/PM of 26 July 2018 setting out the terms of application of Law No. 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 on the protection and promotion of persons with disabilities
- the signing of Decree No. 2021/751 of 28 December 2021 on the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006
- the signing of Decree No. 2021/753 of 28 December 2021 ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 29 January 2018

⁵ Cf. *Cameroon tribune* du 24 septembre 2019, consulté le 14 septembre 2022.

- the signing of decree No. 040/PM of 19 May 2022 setting out the terms and conditions for granting age exemptions for public competitive examinations and recruitment to the State Public Service
- the systematic translation into sign language of the speeches of the Head of State to the Nation at the end of each year and by certain administration services including the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Public Health and Elections Cameroon as part of their awareness and/or information activities
- the support of the Hélène Ressicaud Foundation for the promotion of the hearing impaired (FEPPDA) by the Ministries of Social Affairs, Basic Education and Finance⁶.

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The Commission urges the Government to take special measures for deaf and hard of hearing persons, such as:

- access to information by:
 - o communication through posters for all key information
 - o the creation of dedicated information programmes on television
 - o sign language interpretation and/or subtitling of key television programmes
 - o SMS (electronic transmission) of important messages.
- training teachers to use sign languages for inclusive education, including opening a 'Sign Language Series' in all teacher training colleges in the country, from the first year to the postgraduate level
- training doctors and nurses in inclusive medicine while ensuring that every hospital has an inclusive unit
- providing sign language assistance or information in public services
- increasing training and recruitment opportunities - especially in large organisations - for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons
- organizing training sessions for the families of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, to facilitate their family care.

The Commission urges the parents of deaf or hard-of-hearing children to send them to school in the same right as ordinary children,

The Commission urges civil society organisations, religious groups and traditional chieftainships to train their members in the use of sign languages to promote the inclusive awareness method,

⁶ Cf. *Cameroon tribune* du 8 octobre 2020.

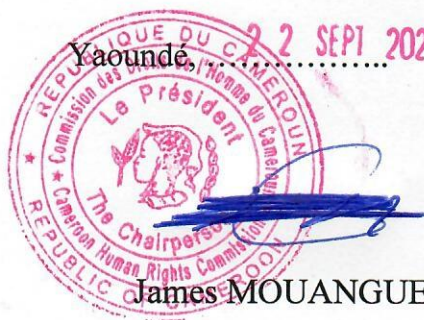
The Commission encourages public and private higher education institutions to train journalists in inclusive journalism, including specialisation,

The Commission strongly reminds the owners of public and private television channels of repeated letters requesting them to set up a news slot in sign language at least once a day,

The Commission, for its part, will continue to promote and protect human rights and raise the awareness of public authorities and citizens about non-discrimination against deaf and hearing-impaired persons and will continue to work for respect for the rights of all vulnerable persons,

The Commission further encourages any person who is a victim or witness of a human rights violation to contact it, including via its **toll-free number 1523**.

Yaoundé, 22 SEPT 2022



James MOUANGUE KOBILA